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KAFIRISTAN.*

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C. I. M.



THE country about which I hope to be able to interest you to-night was, up to a few years ago, entirely unknown and unexplored, and still remains one of those few inhabited regions of the world only partially understood. Many accounts have been given us by painstaking compilers of the narratives of various more or less trustworthy Oriental travellers, who had visited, or professed to have visited, the sombre valleys and the wild independent mountaineers who people this little-known land, and the genius of Rudyard Kipling selected this very country as the scene of one of his most remarkable stories—the story of the man who would be a king. I am compelled to confess that Mr. Kipling's exquisite story is not one whit more imaginative or less true to exact fact than many of the narratives of those earlier writers I have referred to.

The whole district is known by the name of Kafiristan, which literally means "the land of the Infidel," just as Hindustan means "the land of the Hindu" and Afghanistan "the land of the Afghan." This designation, originally applied to the country as a term of reproach by the Mohammedan peoples, by whom it is now completely encircled, is so well known to scientific geographers and other learned men, and has been so long accepted as the true name of the whole country, that it would be unwise and confusing for us now to change it, even if we had any other word at our command which would more correctly and definitely explain our meaning. Moreover, the term "Kafir" is readily accepted by the people to whom it is applied, who may indeed be said

* Paper read at the Royal Geographical Society, June 25, 1894, Map, p. 288.



KAFIRISTAN

to illustrate the journeys of

G. S. Robertson, C.S.L.

to glory in the title, although it is one which they themselves are quite incapable of pronouncing.

Kafiristan, then, is a geographical expression used to designate the country of those non-Mahomedan tribes who inhabit that space left blank in our maps, which is bounded on the east by Chitral and the Kunar valley, on the south-east by the Kunar valley, on the west by Afghanistan, and on the north by the Hindu Kush and by Badakhshan. Politically speaking, the whole region is bounded on the east by Chitral and the debatable land of the Kunar valley, and on all other sides by Afghan territory.

Before my own visit to Kafiristan, with one single exception, no other European had ever penetrated there. The exception referred to was Lockhart's mission, which in September, 1885, crossed from Chitral into the upper part of the Bashgul valley, remained there a few days, and then withdrew into Chitral by another road.

The gallant McNair, whose untimely death deprived the Indian Survey Department of one of its most resolute and enterprising officers, never entered the real Kafir country at all; he only succeeded in reaching some of the Kalash villages of Chitral, which he mistook for the true Kafiristan. The Kalash referred to are an idol-worshipping tribe, slaves to the Mehtar of Chitral, and must not be confounded with the independent mountaineers of Kafiristan, from whom they differ in language, dress, manners, and customs, but still more notably in their mental and physical characteristics.

The actual amount of country I was able to explore was not of any great extent. I traversed the whole of the Bashgul valley, and many of its subsidiary valleys, from end to end, and crossed from it into the top of the Minján valley of Badakhshan. I also examined the Kunar valley, and many of its side valleys from Mirkani to Bailam. Finally, I penetrated into one of the inner valleys of Kafiristan, called Viron or Wiron by Mahomedans, and Presun by the Kafirs. This is probably the most sacred, as it is certainly the most interesting, place in the whole country. In accomplishing this very limited amount of travel I expended more than a year. Tribal jealousies were so great, and my position was oftentimes so difficult, that it was frequently a question, not of my being able to get on, but of my being able to maintain myself in the country at all; while on one occasion the uncomfortable suggestion was fiercely debated if it would not be advisable for the tribe to keep me a close prisoner for three years, and compel me during that period to send to India for as much money and as many rifles as my proposed custodians should see fit to demand.

On another occasion I was civilly but decidedly told by my first entertainers, the Kam tribe, that I must leave their country altogether. I not only had to comply with this order, but they also refused to allow me to proceed straight up the Bashgul valley to the country of another

tribe, the Lutdeh Kafirs, who had been clamouring for a second visit from me, and, as an inducement, had promised to take me to the valley occupied by the Presun or Viron people, to whom I have already slightly referred. Unfortunately, however, the Lutdeh men had in the mean time raided through the Presun valley, and into the territory of another tribe I was most desirous of visiting. This complicated matters very greatly; and when I reached the Lutdeh people, after a toilsome round-about march over the hills, I found to my mortification that their fervour in my behalf had greatly cooled down, and that under Chitral influence, which was then very strong with them, they were no longer desirous of my remaining in their country. Under these circumstances, and also to gain time, I was compelled to seek the hospitality of an old outlaw, who most kindly entertained me for some days, when we parted, he to leave Kafiristan for ever, as the place had become too hot for him, and I to try and discover some means of getting back to my first entertainers, the Kam. After much trouble and difficulty, I eventually succeeded in doing so, and returned to Kamdash to find that village on the verge of furious fighting on my account. It was only after great effort that bloodshed was avoided, and the tribe, reunited for the moment, agreed to take me to that inner valley on which my heart was set. My journey there was sufficiently uncomfortable. My escort consisted of my active opponents amongst the Kam people, for it was only on my consenting to be so accompanied that fighting was avoided, and it was possible for me to go on at all. I trusted, moreover, to my personal influence over the unruly members of my escort, so soon as we had once started away from the village, to enable me to get on satisfactorily; but, unluckily, I fell ill on the march, and was consequently unable to restrain the first beginnings of a disturbance which eventually grew to serious dimensions. My companions tried every dodge Kafirs know of bullying and blackmailing. Each succeeding morning brought its daily quarrel. Sometimes they deserted me altogether, or pretended to do so, and always tried this manœuvre at some more or less critical moment—as, for instance, when we were in a village supposed to be dangerous and hostile to us. Finally they became so outrageous that they rushed my tent, secured my firearms, arrested my servants, and I myself was compelled to escape from them over a fort wall during the night, to avoid being tied to poles and carried off a prisoner.

Amongst all these disturbing influences it might be thought that my life was not of a kind conducive to quiet observation, or the drawing of careful deductions from what I actually saw; but as a matter of fact there comes a time, much sooner than might be imagined, when conduct which under other circumstances would be justly considered outrageous, is accepted as a matter of course, and one's life flows on as placidly under strange and unprecedented conditions, as if one were merely involved in the ordinary everyday petty worries of civilized life.

Then possible dangers no longer appeal to the dulled imagination, and if they do eventually arise, they are yet found to bring with them their own peculiar compensation. It may be said with truth that my Kafir friends unconsciously did everything in their power to keep my mind active, and prevent its stagnating from monotony. So, therefore, if I failed in observing those things which I ought to have observed, the cause of failure must be held as due to my own deficiencies, and not as the result of the odd behaviour of my friends. When the time came for me to leave Kafiristan, which I did with the almost too cordial approval of my hosts, I went away with something very like regret, and with a fixed determination to return the following year, when affairs might be expected to have quieted down a little. That determination, however, was never carried out; it is probable now that it never will be, and perhaps the wish to do it is much less strong than it was, even if it exist at all. Yet I now and always shall feel kindly disposed towards the Kafirs. Several of them are my sincere friends, large numbers are well disposed towards me; and no blood lies between us. In some of the broils and turmoils blows were exchanged and one or two wounds inflicted, but no single man was killed or even seriously injured on my account. I never had to fight Kafirs myself, nor was I ever actually attacked by them. Indeed, in spite of their violent behaviour at times, I have more than once been assured by my most troublesome opponent that they bore me personally no ill-will whatever, for, as they said, I had never wronged nor injured any of them. They admitted that all their anger was roused by the suspicion that I gave money and other presents to certain of their fellows, while their peculiar notion of independence was, that all should share and share alike in my favours, whether they had done any actual work for me or not.

As an instance how comparatively easy these wild people are to manage, I may mention that I have sometimes sat placidly watching a Kafir parliament, when from the fierce gestures in my direction, made with splendid dramatic action by men pale with rage, any one unacquainted with the people might have fairly assumed they were demanding me as their sacrifice, and when their words were no doubt outrageous enough, could I have fully understood them. When the disaffected in a body have sprung to their feet and left the camp, so to speak, I have on such occasions more than once stopped one of the furious throng to ask some trivial but kindly question about his family. The result was almost invariably the same. The choking madman would glare at me for an instant, cast a wild glance at his companions, give a rueful kind of smile, and nod his head or wave his hand if he were too much discomposed to be able to reply in words.

There were, indeed, critical moments when a conflict seemed inevitable, yet it never occurred. Absolute command of one's temper—and it is

curious how completely a real crisis quiets the anger of an Anglo-Saxon and clears his mind—is a most potent weapon with which in nine cases out of ten a Kafir can be utterly defeated, provided always that he has no real injury to avenge. All the time I was in Kafiristan I hardly had anything stolen. I have had sheep carried off, and, as I have already mentioned, my guns were on one occasion seized, but I got all my property back again in every single instance; I even made some Kafirs give up the property they had plundered from a man discharged from my service, and whom they consequently looked upon as their lawful prey. When the fact is carefully remembered that these same Kafirs are hereditary brigands and assassins, there is little wonder that I should feel kindly disposed towards them for their average treatment of me—a man so entirely different from any one else they had ever seen.

Kafiristan consists of an irregular series of main valleys, for the most part deep, narrow, and tortuous, into which a varying number of still more difficult, narrower, and deeper valleys, ravines, and glens pour their torrent water. The hills which separate the main drainage valleys the one from the other are all of them of considerable altitude, rugged and toilsome. As a consequence, during the winter Kafiristan is practically converted into a number of separate communities with no means of intercommunication. Take, for example, the Bashgul valley: during the time the hills are under snow, the only way to reach the Katir people who inhabit the upper portion of the district is to travel from the Kunar valley through the territory first of the Kam and then of the Mádugal tribe. Supposing either of these two tribes be at war with the Katirs, the last named are then completely isolated from the rest of the world, until the passes open in the spring. The inhabitants of Viron or Presun are similarly cut off from the surrounding tribes, for the only entrance to their country, when the passes are closed, is up the river which flows into the Kunar at Chigar Serai. All the passes which lead from Badakhshan into Kafiristan are certainly over 15,000 feet in height. I myself have only explored two of these, each of which was above the altitude mentioned, and I was assured that those two were the lowest of the series. On the Chitral side the roads over the enclosing ranges, although somewhat less elevated, are still very high, and are completely closed by snow in the winter. There is one low ridge 8400 feet between the Kalash village of Utzun and the Kafir village of Gurdesh, but even that is impassable for two or three months every winter.

Some of the ravines up which regular roads run are of most picturesque and romantic description, others are bare rocky glens. Indeed, many various kinds of scenery are to be met with according to differing altitudes and to other circumstances. At the lower elevations fruit trees abound, and in the hot weather the traveller pushes his way

along the torrent's bank through thickets and tangles of wild grapes and pomegranates. At such low elevations splendid horse-chestnuts and other shade trees afford pleasant resting-places, while the hill-slopes are covered by shrubs, wild olive, and evergreen oaks. At somewhat higher elevations, say from 5000 to 8000 or 9000 feet, dense pine and cedar forests abound. They are composed of magnificent trees, which with a snow background afford most delightful prospects. Higher still, the pines cease; the hills are then almost bare, rocky, shaly, etc.; while the willow, birch, and the juniper cedar are the chief trees met with, and the wild rhubarb grows abundantly. Higher still—that is to say, above 13,000 feet—there is no vegetation of any kind, except rough grasses and mosses.

The rivers, as they descend the corkscrew valleys and are fed by subsidiary streams from the ravines, glens, or mountain recesses, increase in velocity until they become raging torrents, dashing against the huge boulders which obstruct their course, and flinging high their spray with deafening uproar. In many places where the tortured water foams and lashes itself against the rocks on its margins or in its bed, the river almost assumes the nature of a cataract, and is indescribably beautiful. Tree-trunks encumber the waterway, jam themselves against the rocks, pile up in picturesque confusion, or hurry round and round in the swirl of a backwater. To lovers of wild scenery many parts of Kafiristan could not be surpassed anywhere. In the autumn and winter months many of the valleys are in shadow very early in the day, and are strangely sombre and mysterious-looking. I always remember my first visit to Kafiristan in October, 1889, when a certain hot day's march was followed by the swift-coming afternoon shadow. How, tired out, I sat by the river's edge under a horse-chestnut, whose changing leaves alone relieved the deepening gloom. My companions were some distance away, while near at hand a hideous effigy transfixed me with its white stone eyes. The only human figure in the scene except my own, was a wild-looking man clad merely in a black goatskin, his long hair streaming behind, as he ran softly but swiftly down a rocky slope, hand on dagger, to discover who the intruder was. His movements were so noiseless, the valley was so deeply in shadow, and yet objects could be discerned so distinctly, that the whole seemed like a dream; and if ever I am suddenly asked what Kafiristan is like, this scene—the sombre valley, the wild river, the horse-chestnut tree, the fantastic effigy, and the hardly less fantastic man—rises at once before my eyes.

All the rivers of Kafiristan drain into the Kabul river, either directly or after first emptying themselves into the Kunar river at Arundo, Palasgar, Chigar Serai, etc. Of the valleys to the extreme west I know nothing except by hearsay, but I believe the Ramgul and the Kulam torrents joining together reach the Kabul river through Lughman. The

next valley to the east, the Kti, joins its waters with those of the Presun valley, and after receiving the Wai river, flows into the Kunar at Chigar Serai. The Ashkun rivers probably also join the Kti, and Presun torrents, before they empty themselves into the Kunar. The Bashgul river with its various tributaries, the largest of which are the Skorigul, the Nichingul, and the Pittigul streams, joins the Kunar exactly opposite the cultivated fields just above the "Gabar" village of Arundo.

The main roads of communication, if roads they may be called, are almost invariably along the river-banks, so narrow and so steep are the valleys. Although they vary very greatly the one from the other, they have this quality in common, that they are almost always extremely difficult. That part of the Bashgul valley above Chabu, as well as nearly the whole of the Presungul, is quite easy when you once get into those districts; but all other Kafiristan roads which I travelled over were simply abominable. Perhaps the worst of all are those on the left bank of the lower part of the Bashgul river and those in the Dungul valley. There it is rare to find even a couple of hundred yards of moderately level ground, so in marching it is one incessant clamber along rough stony tracks, which run over spurs and bluffs, or by means of frail wooden galleries across the faces of low precipices. Sometimes it is most difficult to get over the smooth rock surfaces; indeed, in some positions, where the ground is of this character, the inexperienced or badly shod traveller may only be able to proceed at all by edging himself along in a sitting posture. Dogs cannot get over those places without assistance. The bridges over the rivers are sometimes extremely well built, but are high above the water, and often not more than 18 or 20 inches wide in the middle, with parapets only a few inches high, so that the whole structure looks far more like an irrigation trough than a bridge. They are somewhat trying to the nerves, especially if you are suffering or are just recovering from an attack of fever. If this is a description of the good bridges, it may easily be conceived how extremely bad the inferior ones are. Sometimes a fractured tree hanging across a narrow stream is utilized as a bridge, and the traveller has to run along the tree-trunk at an angle dependent on the height at which the tree partially broke away from the parent stem. Yet these are pleasant and safe ways over the torrent, when compared with certain rickety old bridges, which groan and sway under you at every footstep. There is one in particular of which I have a most vivid recollection. My Balti coolies, five in number, who accompanied me throughout my journey, and who in their own native country are familiar with some of the most execrable bridges in the world, found the particular bridge of which I am speaking too trying for their nerves. Two of them had to be carefully helped over, although it was not more than 15 yards in length. When covered with hard slippery snow, pitted with the irregular frozen footsteps of travellers

who had gone before, it was distinctly dangerous. The jagged rocks in the torrent below always seemed to hunger for you to fall upon them. In many instances the bridges simply consist of a single pole or two poles placed side by side; it then requires a good head to cross them. The rope or rather twig bridge common in Gilgit, Chitral, and the Kunar valley is never met with in Kafiristan. The only one of that description with which I am acquainted, is placed every year across the mouth of the Bashgul river by the inhabitants of Birkot, for the convenience of Kafirs trading with them and with the other villages of the Kunar valley. In the Presun country the bridges are remarkably good. They are made on the principle of the dug-out boat from large tree-trunks, and are both easy and safe. They are often elaborately ornamented by the carved heads of animals placed at the end of long poles stuck at intervals along the parapet on both sides. There is one other point which makes travelling in Kafiristan difficult. I remember on one occasion being ludicrously embarrassed by finding my track abruptly stop at the foot of an unscalable bluff. The explanation of course was, that I had reached a wading-place, of which there are several between Kamdesh and Lutdeh. Some of them are of considerable extent and easy enough, except for the sharp stones in the river bed, which are apt, if you are wading with naked feet, to pain you into a stumble and a ducking; but others are actually dangerous both from the force of the water and from its depth. Yet the worst I know was only up to the waist and of short extent, the footway being an under-water ledge at the foot of a precipice. It was very hard to keep close enough to the rock to remain on the ledge, and not be washed out into the raging torrent. At that place dogs had to be dragged through anyhow, and the unfortunate animals sometimes emerged from the ordeal more than half drowned. At all the wading-places, particularly during the snow-melting season, the current is strong, and great caution has to be observed.

None of the passes are easy. They must be tackled according to their altitude, the amount of snow upon them, the season of the year, the time of day, etc. I suffered terribly on the Mandál Pass, but the reason was that the Kafirs gave me credit for being as good a mountaineer and as rapid a traveller as themselves. The result was that I arrived at the last climb late in the morning under a hot sun, and the softened snow not only gave me enormous trouble in surmounting the pass, but afterwards kept letting me through suddenly, dashing my feet against or between the stones concealed beneath it. At one of these mishaps my foot got firmly fixed for a considerable time, while the knee of the free leg was forced up somewhere near my chin. It took strong men, pulling hard, a considerable amount of labour before they dragged me out of my uncomfortable and helpless position.

But I must hurry on to describe the people, their organization into tribes, their manners, customs, etc. The time at my disposal will not allow of my giving much more than a cursory glance at these important points.

Of the origin of the Kafirs I will only say that, in my opinion, it will be ultimately accepted that the present inhabitants of Kafiristan are mainly descended from the old Indian population of Eastern Afghanistan, who refused to embrace Islam in the eleventh century, and fled for refuge to these difficult valleys, where they found ancient peoples, whom they subjugated, enslaved, or partially amalgamated with. These ancient peoples are probably represented at the present time by the Presuns, the Jazhis, the Arams, etc.

I have, I think, conversed with representatives of all the different tribes of Kafiristan, with the exception of a mysterious people called the Ashkun, who, from their inveterate hostility to the inhabitants of all the surrounding valleys, except the Wai people, are really as unknown to the great majority of the Kafirs as they are to me. They live in the district between the Ramgul and the Kulum on the one hand, and the Wai country on the other. From what I have heard of them, they appear to be separated from the Ramgul and Kulum Kafirs by a range of mountains. The rivers which drain their country flow into the united Presun and Kti rivers, a short distance above Chigra Serai. This people is probably akin to the Wai. Many of them are now Mohammedan, as are also several of the lower Wai villages.

In Kafiristan proper there are certainly three entirely distinct languages, besides many dialects. The language spoken by the greatest number is that used by the Siah-Posh people, so called because they affect dark-coloured, nearly black clothing. All the Siah-Posh, however, are not of the same tribe; but although there are dialectic differences in the languages used amongst them, yet they all understand one another readily, and their language may consequently be called the Siah-Posh tongue, a definition which, if not absolutely correct, is at least convenient. The other chief languages in Kafiristan are those spoken by the Wai and by the Presun people, which differ both from one another, and from the language spoken by the Siah-Posh. On this point many Bashgul Kafirs have assured me that any of their number who go to the Wai valley young enough, can easily learn the speech of that people, while no one under any circumstances, and no matter how young, can ever learn the Presun language.

The Presun are certainly unlike all other Kafirs; they are possibly an aboriginal race. I have listened most carefully to their priests and other officials chanting at sacrifices, etc., but I could never learn to repeat nor could remember one single word I heard; indeed, at those religious functions the sounds uttered by the officiating priests seemed to

me more like a soft musical mewing, than anything else I can compare them to.

Classifying the tribes according to speech, we have then, first, the Siah-Posh; secondly, the Wai, including probably the Ashkun; thirdly, the Presun.

The great majority of Kafirs are Siah-Posh. The tribes coming under that designation inhabit all the northern valleys of Kafiristan, although they are separated from one another at one point by the Presun valley, as you may see on the map. Amongst those I have called Siah-Posh the chief tribe is known as the Katir. They inhabit the populous west valley which borders on Afghanistan, and which is said to contain between twenty and thirty villages. In that situation they are known as the Ramgul Kafirs, or the Gabariks. To the east of the Ramgul country is the Kulam valley. It only contains four villages. Its main river joins that from the Ramgul valley, and flows into the Kabul river at Lughman. To the east of the Kulam valley reside the Kti branch of the Katirs. They possess but two villages, and one of these is very small. The Kti river, as I mentioned before, joins with the Presun and Wai streams, and falls into the Kunar river at Chigar Serai. Finally, the upper part of the Bashgul valley, as far down as the country of the Mádugál Kafirs, is also occupied by a branch of the great Katir tribe, which is more numerous than all the rest of the tribes in the same valley put together. In the lower part of the Bashgul valley dwell the important Kám Kafirs, with the Mádugál tribe to their immediate north, and the small Kashtán tribe to the west. Still lower down, there is the small village of Siah-Posh Kafirs, quite separate and distinct from all the other tribes. They are supposed to be partly composed of an aboriginal race called the Jazhis. The other chief tribes, the Presun and the Wai, occupy the positions shown in the map. What I have called branches of the great Katir tribe are really distinct and independent communities, but their intertribal organization is probably much the same in each case. Each tribe in Kafiristan is split up into families or clans, and the individual importance of any single Kafir depends entirely on the numerical strength of the clan he belongs to, and upon his own position in that clan. The affairs of a tribe are nominally arranged by the consultation together of the headmen, who are called "jast;" but, as a matter of fact, in ordinary times the business of a tribe falls very much into the hands of four or five of these headmen, or "jast," who are distinguished beyond their fellows for sagacity or valour, but who must also be the possessors of considerable wealth. Indeed, the importance of worldly possessions is very strongly, perhaps too strongly, recognized in Kafiristan. A man may be brave, devoted, and sagacious; he may have spent the whole of his flocks and herds and other property in becoming a "jast;" he may also be of good family; yet, if he be not possessed of considerable personal wealth, his weight in

the tribal council is comparatively small, except in the case of an orator, when to a certain extent he may atone by fervid speeches for lack of wealth.

A man can only become a "jast," or headman, by going through a prescribed ceremony, which lasts nearly three years with the Kám tribe; amongst the Katirs its duration is somewhat shorter. During that period he has to banquet the whole of his tribe on eleven different occasions, and entertain his brother "jasts" with ten separate feasts. He has to do this in conjunction with a woman who may or may not be his wife. She generally is not, for the expense of two people going through the ceremonies at the same time is so great, that none but the richest families can afford it. The usual plan is for the husbands to make a private arrangement amongst themselves, by which the wife of one man goes through the ceremonies with another individual, whose wife in her turn will reciprocate by distributing food in conjunction with the husband of the first woman. The woman's sole reward seems to be that she is permitted to attend one or two particular dances, and has also the privilege of wearing Markhor hair round the tops of her dancing-boots. The man, on the other hand, becomes an exalted personage, one of the great men of the tribe. The complete ceremonies for becoming a "jast" are elaborate and complicated. They would be tedious to listen to in detail. In the depth of winter the man grows a miniature field of wheat in his own living room, and this is remarkable amongst the Kám tribe as the only occasion on which a man interests himself or actually works in agricultural pursuits. He has also to wear a particular uniform on appropriate occasions, to make certain sacrifices, appear at the prescribed dances, sleep out at particular shrines, and for one period consisting of several weeks is never permitted to leave his village. It is a very curious custom that, although once a "jast" always a "jast," yet a very wealthy man is practically compelled by public opinion to keep on going through this ceremony again and again, or else he must make his sons and nephews, however young, headmen one after another. Unless he does this he is certain to fail in maintaining his influence and popularity with his fellow-tribesmen. Sumptuary laws are very stringent. No one but a "jast" would dream of wearing a bright-coloured robe at religious dances, nor a gaudy Oriental turban, unless in the case of a well-known warrior of good family, who might be invited to join the dance to complete the number of performers, in which case he also would be decorated something after the fashion of the others. One friend of mine, a plain man, a good but not particularly famous warrior, was, for some reason or other, very desirous of being allowed to wear red trousers. After giving six cows to be eaten by the villagers, this privilege was accorded him, but even then he seemed greatly ashamed of his finery, and always covered up the bright-coloured garment as much as he could with his long brown Chitrali

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Among the documents in the possession of the Anthropological Institute are a considerable number of MS. vocabularies, in many cases unique in their character.

As it has never come within the scope of the Institute to devote a large portion of the "Journal" to the publication of such material, it has been suggested that a fund should be raised by subscription, independently of the Institute, to deal with these documents.

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Address.....

biggest man of the tribe was half an inch lower in stature. He was an extraordinarily powerful fellow; but, as a rule, the men of medium height are not only the most active, the fastest runners, the most enduring travellers, but are generally the most physically powerful also. The women, with some few exceptions, are of low stature. Very many are weakly-looking, yet their powers of endurance are simply marvellous. They often make extremely long marches, carrying loads.

The commonest dress of the Siah-Posh is a goatskin confined at the waist by a leather strap, which also supports the inevitable dagger. This is the commonest dress on the whole, because it is worn by the poorest classes, who are naturally the most numerous part of any community. I have never seen a goatskin garment worn under any circumstances by a woman. The favourite dress of the fairly well-to-do Kafir male of the Eastern valley is a coarse cotton shirt and trousers, a brown Chitrali or a black Minjani robe, brown soft leather boots, and perhaps also footless Chitrali stockings. The national garment, however, is a tunic, which all women wear without exception, and many men as well. It is made of thick dark brown woollen cloth, and in women reaches from the shoulders to the knee; a wedge-shaped piece of the body in front and behind is exposed owing to the peculiar shape of the garment. It is girdled at the waist by a long dark red flat cord about an inch and a quarter broad, ending in tassels. It has a red edging round the bottom; there are no sleeves, but the upper part of the garment is so fashioned that the wearer often looks, if viewed from the front or the side, as if she were wearing an Inverness cape. The men never bind this tunic tightly to the person as the women do, but simply wear it thrown loosely over the shoulders. The Presun people wear very thick loose grey blanketing clothes, which give them a cumbersome, awkward appearance. The Wai people wear cotton clothes, and affect bright colours whenever they can get them. The Siah-Posh women wear square cotton caps at the back of the head, while the girls confine their locks with a double thread fastened round the head at the level of the brows. The official head-dress of the Siah-Posh women is the curious horned cap, of which you will see a specimen in another room. This head-covering is almost invariably worn by the Katir women, but is only used on important ceremonial occasions in the other Siah-Posh tribes. In the Western valleys the fashion is to have the horns much lower than those worn in the Bashgul valley, but in other respects the head-dresses are identical. One of the chief ornaments of these curious horned caps is a number of common brass thimbles. On one occasion I noticed on one of these thimbles a short English inscription, "For a good girl," or something of that sort; and this is remarkable, for it was the only instance in which I met with written or printed characters during my residence in Kafiristan. The Wai women often wear large drab turbans ornamented with festoons of cowrie-shells, and they are

also much addicted to the employment of pretty red and white beads as an additional embellishment to their persons.

Children are always born in a special building on the outskirts of a village. The way they are named is very peculiar. An old woman runs rapidly over the names of the baby's ancestors or ancestresses, as the case may be, and stops at the instant the infant first begins to feed; the name on the reciter's lips when that event occurs being the name by which the child will thenceforth be known during its life. As a consequence of this peculiar custom, it not unfrequently happens that more than one member of a family is compelled to bear the same name. In such cases the children are distinguished from one another in speaking of them by the prefix junior or senior, as the case may be. Kafir men and women are known by their own particular name affixed to that of their father: thus, Chandlu Astán means Astán the son of Chandlu. In the case of very popular names, the grandfather's cognomen has frequently to be employed also to distinguish the various individuals: thus, Lutkam Chandlu Merik means Merik the son of Chandlu, the grandson of Lutkam. Occasionally, though rarely, the mother's name is used along with the father's; so Bachik-Sumri Shiok means Shiok the child of Basik and of Sumri. There is no objection in Kafiristan to a child bearing the same name as its father, as there so commonly is throughout the East; indeed, you constantly hear of Merik Merik, Gutkech Gutkech, and similar instances of father and son bearing identical names.

The most striking mental peculiarities of Kafirs are their extreme cupidity, their extraordinary jealousy of one another, and the intensity of their intertribal hatred. Their cupidity is, indeed, a marvellous sight to witness. A Kafir will come into your house or tent, sit down on a chair or stool, and talk quietly until he begins to cast his eyes round the place. You may then notice in many cases the man's eyes half close, his face flush, and his whole demeanour become an extraordinary example of extreme covetousness. Their jealousy of one another is so great that they are often ready to break out into murderous quarrels even on the mere suspicion that an English traveller, like myself, was giving away presents with partiality. Their intense intertribal hatred entirely deadens their political foresight; and a Kafir tribe is always ready to beg the help of its most inveterate Mahomedan enemy and even introduce him into its territory in order to aid in the chastisement of some other Kafir tribe. Kafirs are quite the reverse of intolerant. At the foot of the Kamdesh hill there are two hamlets, one to the north called Agatsi, the other to the west called Agaru. These tiny settlements are peopled by Kafirs who have changed their religion to Mahomedanism. Their family connections amongst the Kafirs would be just as ready to avenge the killing of one of these renegades as they would be to avenge the blood of a co-religionist of their own family.

The Kafirs are by no means simple in character; they can intrigue; concoct secret plots, and then carry them out with the secrecy and subtlety of the average Oriental. On one occasion a headman of Kam-desh went on a visit to the Amir of Kabul. On his way home, while journeying up the Kunar valley, he was waylaid by some followers of the fanatical priest of Dir and murdered. The man who actually dealt the fatal blow was a Kafir who had embraced Islam. He escaped to Dir, and lived there under the protection of its powerful priest. The headmen of Kamdesh consulted together how the murder should be avenged. Eventually they decided on a plan which shows well the persistency with which a Kafir can carry out a settled resolve. They employed a man to go to Dir to declare himself a convert to Mahomedanism, and to become a follower and disciple of the fanatic who is the head of the Mussulman religion at that place. Their emissary remained in Dir for more than two years before he could, under the veil of friendship and a common religion, persuade the murderer to pay a stealthy visit to Kafiristan, where, of course, he was at once seized by prearrangement and immediately killed. The mental powers of an ordinary Kafir are by no means inconsiderable. I took a lad to India with me who belonged to a poor family, and was of a somewhat degraded type. When we returned to Kafiristan, amongst other presents I handed over to him were some 280 Indian rupees. He begged that, instead of paying him in Indian rupees, I would give him their equivalent in Kabul money. The Kabul rupee is worth twelve and a half annas, while the Indian rupee is worth sixteen. I carefully calculated out the number of Kabul rupees to which he was entitled, and handed them over to him. He at once objected, saying my calculation was wrong. We had an elaborate argument, I appealing to my figures, and he appealing to his fingers and toes, which he used to represent scores of rupees. In the end, he convinced me that he was right and I was wrong. Now, this man was certainly not above the average of Kafir intellect, and he never could explain to me the means by which he arrived at the correct number of Kabul rupees he was entitled to receive. On another occasion I had forgotten the arrangement of letters which enabled me to open a certain puzzle lock. I mentioned the dilemma in which I was to a certain friend of mine—a man who was solely remarkable for his splendid courage and his numerous homicides. He took my puzzle lock in his hand and sat playing with it until he actually found out how to open it, nor did he ever afterwards forget the arrangement of the letters by which that feat could be accomplished. Yet he had never in his life seen a printed letter until I showed him these on the puzzle lock. As a third instance of their remarkable cleverness in many respects; I was showing the priest on one occasion a small conjuring trick, the principle of which, though simple enough, I should have taken many days to discover myself. I had a double tin funnel, which,

when the thumb was placed over the narrow orifice, allowed fluid poured in to rise up into a hidden chamber, where it could be restrained or set free at will by the movement of a finger on an air-hole. The trick was to fill this funnel and its secret chamber with wine, which was then all allowed apparently to flow away. Water was then run through the funnel, which was shown to the people, and finally, the finger being removed from the air-hole, the wine was allowed to escape from the hidden chamber, and the spectators were expected to be mightily mystified. On my showing this little toy to the priest, to try to mystify him in the usual way, he quietly sat down on a stool and ruminated for a few moments, and then looking up, explained that he knew all about it. And so he did ; he had thought it all out quietly in a few minutes.

The religion of the Kafirs is idolatry, with traces also of ancestor-worship. Imra is the creator of all things, and there are a large number of secondary deities, both male and female, whom Persian-speaking Kafirs have described to me as "prophets." Of these, Moni appears to be the most ancient, and Gish, the war-god, the most popular. There are a large number of other minor deities, also, who preside over women and children, who must be sacrificed to for wealth, and who give fruitful harvests, etc. Special animals have to be sacrificed to particular gods : thus, Imra receives cows, Gish male goats, Dizani a goddess, sheep, etc.; but we shall only have time this evening to speak of Gish, the war-god. He is believed by the Kafirs to have been created in a miraculous way by Imra. He was a marvellous warrior and slayer of men. They assert that he it was who killed Hassan and Hussein, cut off their heads and then played polo with them, just as the Chitrali princes play the game at the present day. After he died, or rather after he quitted this world, his followers divided into two companies. If you are an Englishman, you will be politely assured that the upper classes went to "Lon-don," and the lower orders settled in Kafiristan. Gish has shrines in every true Kafir village, and the corners of his small temples are not unfrequently ornamented with war-trophies stuck on the end of poles. The object worshipped is either a plain stone, or a wooden head and face carved in a conventional manner. On these the priest casts flour, etc., and the blood of the sacrifice. A great feature in the war system of the Kafirs is the sending out of young men in couples or in small parties, who penetrate stealthily into the enemy's country and there try to waylay, or murder in their sleep, men, women, and children. As soon as they have succeeded in their object, they race back to their village with the utmost speed of which they are capable, being often closely followed up for a part of the distance by avenging Pathans. It is always known when one of these successful raiding-parties has arrived, by the songs of triumph they sing when they halt some little distance from the

village. If they come back in the evening they generally camp outside all night, singing their song at intervals and receiving the congratulations of their friends. In the morning, arrayed in much finery, with dancing-axes in their hands, they proceed to the dancing-platform, and if they have been lucky enough to bring away some murdered man's clothing with them, they cast it on the ground in front of the rude altar, which is always placed conveniently near. Then, in company with all the women of their family, they start dancing in honour of great Gish. In the intervals of the dance the women shower wheat-grains upon the heroes. The music is supplied by drums alone, as pipes must not play at these Gish observances. If a large raiding-party, a small army, sets out and is successful, there is no dancing to Gish afterwards; nor does it ever take place if the fight has been with fellow-Kafirs, nor if any of the raiding-party have been slain. If you wish to compliment a Kafir, you compare him to Gish; while the prettiest thing you can say to a Kafir woman is to call her "Gish Istri," which means Gish's wife. Besides gods, the Kafirs believe in fairies, and also in devils, who have to be propitiated in order that the crops may not be destroyed. I on one occasion, while making some particular inquiries about Yush, the chief of the devils, found that my friends were very chary about describing him to me. The more my inquiries concerned his appearance, the more embarrassed the spokesman became. At last a thought struck me, and I asked if Yush resembled me—if he were of my colour. "Oh no," was the polite and tactful reply, "he is not like you; he is like the private English soldiers in India." It was in this way that I learnt that the Kafir devil is of a reddish colour. There is a hell in the Kafir theology where wicked people burn. It is situated below the ground, and the aperture which opens into it is guarded by a custodian named Aramallick, who permits none to pass him. The spirit of a dead man becomes a shade, a mere shape, like the phantoms we see in a dream. The religious stories told me were mostly of an infantile description, although some of them were undoubtedly curious. As a rule, however, they are most inconsequential. Kashmir is the most sacred place in the world, because it was the first created country. There is a story of how the world was populated from Kashmir which is not without interest. A confusion of tongues came upon a number of brothers and sisters, the children of Baba (Father) Adam and his wife, who were all sleeping together, so that on waking in the morning a man could only understand the speech of one particular woman; so the company told themselves off in couples who could understand one another, and then wandered away in different directions to populate the world.

Wooden effigies, or a long single stone placed on end, are erected to the memory of dead relations, and although ancestor-worship is denied by the people, I have seen these effigies and monoliths sprinkled with

the blood of sacrifices offered by those of the same family who were suffering from sickness, while at a particular festival food is presented to the family effigies, and placed round the house for the use of departed shades.

There are no human sacrifices under any circumstances in Kafiristan, except that prisoners taken in war are sometimes stabbed in front of the coffins to satisfy the indignant ghost of a dead warrior. Kafirs are never melancholy, and suicide is not only unknown amongst them, but when they are told about it they are unfeignedly surprised.

There is nothing in the shape of prayers; the substitutes are religious dances, sacred songs, and sacrifices.

The sacrifices are carried out by the "utah," or priest; the "debilala," the singer of the praises of the gods; and the "pshur," who is supposed to be temporarily inspired on all such occasions; but no goat or other animal is ever killed for food in Kafiristan except in the orthodox way, and with the appropriate ceremonies. At such times any one may officiate.

The priest—the Kamdesh priest is the seventh of his line in regular descent—is a very important personage. He is allowed to sit on the stool in the open air, whether he has gone through the necessary banqueting or not. He is always a man of wealth, and the head of a clan. He gets a double share of each animal whose sacrifice he presides over, and has other rights and perquisites. On the march and elsewhere, he takes precedence of every one. For some particular reason he must not go near the receptacles for the dead, nor even traverse certain paths which lead to those places. Slaves may not approach the hearth of any house he may possess, nor come too near any of the shrines.

The "debilala" is also a man held in high respect; he recites the praises of the god in whose honour the sacrifice is being made, and at the great religious dances in the springtime he has a special place assigned him in the centre of the performers, and alongside of the priest. He also is debarred from using certain pathways supposed to be impure.

The "pshur," is the individual who becomes temporarily inspired during sacrifices and on other occasions, when he frequently behaves most violently, and is sometimes not soothed before some of the headmen have specially appealed to Imra on his behalf. He is on the whole despised by his fellows, who believe that although he is sometimes really inspired, yet at other times he is simply a liar, as they put it in their charmingly direct way. I have watched the proceedings of many of these "pshurs"; those of the inner valley, where there is one to every village, are held in much greater respect than those of the Siah-Posh. I think the majority of these men believe in themselves to a certain doubtful extent. On one occasion, at night, during a visit from the

Kám priest and the "pshur," I gave them some cognac, as a specimen of Western drinks. Shortly afterwards, a quarter of an hour or so, the "pshur" became greatly agitated, turned quite pale, and trembled all over. The priest at once began high-voiced appeals to Imra, but it was a long time before the "pshur" was himself again. The two men did not leave me without giving me all kinds of warnings and cautions. I was not to go to bed till the morning, and I was to be very careful of the kind of food I ate the following day, the nature of which food was particularly mentioned. It appears that while engaged in talking to me, the "pshur" suddenly became conscious that a fairy's head over my doorway was quietly regarding him. The fairy observed that he or she had come from "Lon-don" to inquire if the "Frank" were there, and on receiving what one would suppose was a somewhat superfluous answer, the fairy gradually faded away.

On another occasion, another "pshur" having a bad cough, I shared with him some opium pills I was using myself for a similar complaint. The result of the opium on the man was, that he was terribly possessed during the day, and jumped and shouted and played all manner of antics. He was, I think, partially deranged in his intellect. He was also a terrible homicide. We were on the march at the time, and all the Kafirs we came across appeared to fear my companion greatly, glancing at him with dislike and distrust. The Kam pshur, who, by the way, was a great friend of mine, was disestablished, disendowed, and kicked out of the tribe on the occasion of two young men getting killed while engaged on a raiding expedition. I suppose he had given a wrong prediction, for when the boys' heads were brought in for the funeral ceremonies, he was ordered to clear out at once and return to his own tribe. It appears that the Kám, having no inspired person of their own, had imported this man from the Mádugál Kafirs, otherwise I do not see how the Kám people could have got rid of him. Once I was greatly embarrassed by one of these "pshurs" having, during his period of inspiration at a sacrifice, set all the Kafirs of the Bashgul valley raiding another Kafir tribe with whom up to that date they were on terms of friendship. Besides the functionaries I have described, there are others who perform certain subordinate duties in relation to the gods. For instance, supposing there is excessive snow or rain, the people collect together in some particular house, and that one of the "jast," who alone can perform the ceremony, binds a piece of cloth turbanwise round his brows, takes a bow in his hand, and after purifying it by the sprinkling of water, proceeds to discover which of the gods is willing to receive a sacrifice. He finds this out by rapidly running over the names of the gods until the bow begins to swing backwards and forwards. The name of the god on his lips when the movement begins is the name of the god desirous of being sacrificed to. An amusing circumstance occurred in this connection on one occasion. The god Aram had consented, in the way I have just described, to

accept a goat offered in the hope of stopping the excessive rain and sleet, but the weather began to clear even before the god's name was given out. On that the prudent giver of the sacrifice postponed his offering, in the hope that he might be able to cheat the god of his due. The priest was excessively angry, and told me the weather would grow worse and worse. I could not help smiling at his apparent earnestness, but by one of those curious coincidences which are the stock in trade of all mystic impostors and other quacks, the weather did get terribly bad, and I was nearly drowned out of my house. I remember two other occasions where a sacrifice was immediately followed by the complete cessation of the natural phenomena by which it was directed.

The mode the Kafirs have of disposing of their dead is peculiar. They are not buried nor burned, but are deposited in large boxes, placed either on the hillside or in some more or less secluded spot. In some few places, notably in Lutdeh, these coffers for the dead are placed just above and close to the village, on the level ground and alongside the road. When the wind blows from that particular direction the result is simply appalling. The boxes are very large, and usually body after body is put into them, as long as the wood resists the natural decay due to time and the weather. Certain great men are occasionally, I think, given a box all to themselves. Only in one or two instances have I seen flags placed by the boxes, or pieces of bright-coloured cloth draped on them. The lid generally has several largish stones placed on it, possibly to prevent its warping and exposing the contents of the coffer. Ornaments, silver earrings, etc., and bright-coloured clothing are sometimes deposited with the dead, as are also wooden bowls containing bread broken up in clarified butter. When through age the woodwork decays, the bones of the dead are exposed, and very little attention is paid to the circumstance.

The funeral ceremonies are most elaborate in certain instances. A little girl who died at Kamdesh was dressed in decent cotton grave-clothes, her relations being wealthy people, and the body was simply carried in a blanket by four men to the cemetery without any ceremony of any kind; a string of weeping women followed behind in pairs or singly, the nearer relations being supported by female friends.

The dead wife of a headman, who had herself gone through the ceremony of banqueting the people, was treated with much greater honour. Placed on an ordinary Eastern bed, and decked out with all the finery the family could muster, with festoons of wheat ears to indicate her liberality during life, the body was held shoulder high by slaves, while the nearest female relatives sat wailing on the ground beneath it. One of them—the only daughter—stood with one hand on the bed addressing her dead mother. Then the band struck up, and a curious dancing scene was presented. Immediately round the corpse was a circle of women, who edged round from right to left, giving a funeral gesture

with the hands shoulder high. This gesture is made with the hands upright, the fingers extended. It consists in jerking the hand rapidly, so that the palms are one instant directed towards the dead body and the next towards the performer; its meaning is supposed to be, "she has gone from us." Outside the circle of women was a circle of men, dancing singly, but much more energetically, and also going sideways. They made a similar gesture to that used by the women, except that the hands, instead of being held at the level of the shoulder, were whirled round at the level of the brows. Outside this second circle were ordinary men-dancers, stamping round mostly in pairs with arms round each other's shoulders. In the intervals of the music the bed was placed on the ground; the chief mourner, sitting on its edge, looked into her dead mother's face, and filled the air with lamentations. She could hardly be prevailed upon to stop sufficiently long for one of the tribal orators to shout out breathless staccato sentences praising the dead woman, her liberality, and the family to which she belonged. All the time wine and food were being handed round to all the spectators. Afterwards the band would strike up again and the dancing be resumed, and so on all day. In the case of men killed in war, or when famous warriors die, the ceremonies are extremely elaborate. On one occasion, two youths, friends of mine, were killed in a raiding expedition. As a kindly act to the bereaved families, the heads were cut off by a friendly tribe and brought into the village, being met and received by a great crowd of lamenting women. The fathers of the poor boys simultaneously cast themselves from their housetops, injuring themselves severely. Straw figures, gorgeously clothed, were attached to the heads, and each on a separate bed was taken to the dancing-platform, where dancing, orations, etc., were continued for two or three days. Then the heads were placed in the boxes in the cemetery, and further observances were carried on with the straw figures alone. Each villager on arriving on the platform invariably went through the action of kissing the dead about a yard off. Large quantities of food and wine were distributed continually. When the throng went away to rest, the figures were consigned to the charge of the women, who sobbed out adjurations to the dead, while at intervals wise old women one by one chanted their genealogies. The orations were made most dramatically. The speaker would step forward to the foot of the bed to gaze an instant at the dead faces, then cover his own face with his mantle and burst into sobs and tears. He would begin addressing them by name in a broken voice, until, recovering himself, he would eloquently praise their bravery, their manliness, as worthy of the families from which they sprung.

A famous warrior died in a distant village while I was at Kamdesh. The corpse was brought in sad procession to Kamdesh, preceded and followed by weeping women. A large number of guns were fired off, both by men in the procession and the men of the village, and the

firing was continued on subsequent days. The ceremonies were much the same as those for the young men, only more elaborate. After the body had been committed to its last resting-place, the following day its straw effigy, lashed to a bed, was danced violently round and round, or shaken violently up and down in time to the drumming and the stepping of the dancers, who honoured themselves and the dead by a display of extraordinary agility. Warriors arriving at intervals during the dance deposited for a time their shields on the bed by the effigy, to indicate their respect for the famous fighter.

After a death the house is purified by water, but the priests will not enter it until the wooden effigies of the dead have been erected. This is done after an interval of a year. These effigies are of all sizes and of various degrees of magnificence, according to the wealth of the deceased family. A very large fine effigy necessitates the feeding of the whole village for several days, while a simple flat affair may cost one banquet only. At the time appointed the wooden figure is carried to the dancing-place, and, if not too heavy, is itself danced on the back of a slave. There is an inner circle of women, who dance round it sideways, and use a certain gesture with the hand held breast high. The hand is half bent, palm upwards, and alternately pointed in a half-circular sweep, first towards the effigy, and then back again towards the performer. This gesture is supposed to mean, "As he or she now is, so shall I become also." Of the other dancers, the men, who are entitled to the privilege, deck themselves out in their most gaudy raiment, while flags are also carried round and round in the moving throng. In one instance a bowl was twirled high by one of the women, to indicate that the deceased—a woman—had been most liberal during her lifetime in giving feasts. Some of the sights seen during funeral observances are highly fantastic. Such, for instance, as a sobbing man, the tears running down his face, yet dancing and capering most energetically.

There are no blood-feuds amongst the Kafirs such as those so fatally common amongst their Afghan neighbours. The penalty for killing a fellow-tribesman is, however, extremely severe. Kafirs are continually quarrelling amongst themselves, and the danger to his family of one man killing another is so well recognized and understood, that men, women, even children, are prepared at all times to throw themselves recklessly between the combatants and try to separate them. It is considered an act of virtue to do this. In these incessant quarrels dagger-wounds are very common, but they are almost invariably inflicted on the hands of those who are trying to separate the quarrellers, and who rush between fighting men with the greatest intrepidity. If a Kafir kill another, he must at once leave his village and become an outcast. His house or houses are burnt by the dead man's family or clan, and his property plundered. He must nevermore return to

his native village except by stealth, and whenever he encounters any member of the dead man's family, he is obliged at once to hide himself in bushes or behind doors, etc. The stigma applies not only to the man, but to his direct descendants and to his children in law. There are several villages which may be called cities of refuge in Kafiristan, where slayers of their fellow-tribesmen reside permanently. They can only be released from their outcast condition by paying down a heavy ransom to the dead man's family. The ransom is so heavy that it is very rarely paid. Indeed, to pay it shows so much wealth and honour, that the man himself and his descendants, when they return to their village, always afterwards carry a specially shaped axe to indicate their social importance. Concerning this question of men killing one another, I have frequently asked Kafirs what would the result be if a man were to slay a fellow-villager while defending his own life from an attack? The answer was invariably the same. The homicide—justifiable homicide as we should call him—becomes at once a "chile," that is an outcast. On my attempting to argue the justice of this, they always made the same reply: the man should have defended his life without killing the other man. This way of avenging a murder is extremely suitable to the small Kafir communities, where the life of every single man is of the utmost value as a factor in the fighting strength of a family or a tribe. For it is obvious that if the custom, "a life for a life," prevailed, the tribe would lose two fighting men instead of one whenever a man was killed in a domestic or village quarrel.

There is little or no ceremony about a Kafir marriage. A man who is enamoured of a young woman, or wishes to get married, sends a friend to the father of his would-be bride and asks her price. It is nothing more than that. If he is an ordinary poor man, he will have to pay eight cows, while if richer he may have to give as many as twelve or sixteen. If the father entertains the proposal of the suitor, he sends back word to that effect, and the man immediately goes to the woman's home, where a goat is sacrificed, and that constitutes the whole of the ceremony. They are then considered married, but the woman remains in her father's house and works for her father only, until the last penny of her price is paid by her husband. Divorce is easy. It appears to simply consist in a man selling his wife to some other man. Kafirs are polygamous, and usually have from one to four, or at the utmost five, wives. When a man dies, his wives revert to his family, and are either sold or retained by his surviving brothers.

I regret that the time at my disposal has not permitted of my entering into more details concerning the manners and the customs of these interesting people; that I have been unable to describe their domestic life, their slaves, their villages, their houses, their shrines, and particularly that I have not been able to give you a description of

the curious inner Kafiristan valley, where there is a great temple to Imra famed throughout Kafiristan—a mysterious hole in the ground, to look down which means certain death to any one, and a wonderful iron bar and sacred stones, which were placed in their present position by Imra himself! In that valley the Kafir houses, instead of being raised two or three stories above ground, descend an equal distance below the ground. There everything appears to be even more strange, fantastic, and unreal than in the Bashgul valley, which always lingers in one's memory as a "faëry lands forlorn." When I first went there I almost believed I had at length landed on Sir John Mandeville's Valley of the Devils; but the people are singularly interesting, and if it cannot be honestly affirmed that truthfulness and frankness are their special characteristics, they are at any rate far more truthful and honourable in their dealings than their immediate neighbours. They have strong family affection; they are devoted to one another in war, and are capable of performing the greatest acts of self-sacrifice, especially in fighting, where I have known a youth, little more than a boy, deliberately stop behind to help a wounded friend, with the absolute certainty that he would himself be killed. He was killed, and to the credit of the Kafirs it may be said, that no one of the tribe expressed the slightest surprise at this act of self-devotion.

Kafirs are naturally boastful, and in their anxiety to impress a stranger with their bravery or their importance in the tribe, do not hesitate to utter splendid mendacities. Most of the early information given me was false from beginning to end, and I still grudge the labour involved in recording it. Yet they are a brave, independent people, who have maintained themselves for centuries against hordes of enemies, not only by reason of the extraordinary difficulties their country presents, but by valour and their magnificent fighting powers. They are entitled to the respect every one must feel for real men, who will fight to the death rather than accept the yoke of the stranger.

Before the reading of the paper, the PRESIDENT said: We are assembled this evening to hear a paper by Mr. Robertson on his journeys in the interior of Kafiristan. Many of us remember the deep interest taken ten years ago in the paper read at that time by Mr. Macnair, who had penetrated to the borders of Kafiristan, and we are very glad to see here present this evening Lord Aberdare, who was President on that occasion. We remember, also, the interest that was taken in the discussion kept up by Sir Henry Yule and Sir Henry Rawlinson, and others learned in everything concerning that part of the world. Unfortunately, we have not present here so many officers as we had then, who are conversant with the question. Sir Peter Lumaden is in Scotland, and I am sorry to say my old comrade and tent-mate, Sir William Lockhart, is also, to his very great regret, unable to be present this evening. We have, however, present with us Colonel Tanner and one or two others.

After the reading of the paper, the following discussion took place:—

The PRESIDENT: The presence here this evening of our old President, Lord Aberdare, reminds me that ten years ago the late Mr. Macnair conducted us to the very threshold of this region, and introduced us to some Kafirs who I find now are not the right sort. Possibly Lord Aberdare may care to remind us of what we learnt that evening; if not, I will ask Colonel Tanner to tell us something of his attempt to reach the land of the Kafirs.

Colonel TANNER: I am a kind of failure. Mr. Robertson succeeded in penetrating and seeing the greater part of this country; I have never been there at all. However, as I have been on the west and the south, I can say a very few words of what I did see on the west when accompanying Sir Samuel Browne's field-force. We penetrated to the Lughman valley, where the whole of the Kafiristan mountains, deeply clad in snow, appeared in our front, distant about two days' march, enticing to look at, but of course, being in an enemy's country, none of us were allowed to go there. On another occasion I came back from Jellalabad in disguise to Aret, a semi-Mohammedan country on the borders of Kafiristan. Unfortunately, here I fell sick and had to return, and that is all I have to say about myself. I would refer to the account of Captain John Wood, who penetrated many years ago to the source of the Oxus, and while at Faizabad came several times in contact with Kafirs. For a great many years Captain Wood's account was all we possessed, until Mr. Robertson appeared before us to-night. Very little trustworthy evidence has been forthcoming about this interesting people, and I congratulate Mr. Robertson very much on the paper he has read and the beautiful pictures he has shown. I hope Mr. Robertson will receive your heartfelt thanks for having performed such a very perilous journey.

The PRESIDENT: I can only again express my regret that we have not among us this evening Sir Peter Lumsden and Sir William Lockhart. They could have told us of what they knew of the Kafirs, the one having accumulated much information in 1867, and the other having actually penetrated into Kafiristan for a short distance; but Mr. Robertson has opened to us an entirely new country. I remember that Sir Henry Yule said, on the occasion of the reading of Colonel Tanner's paper, when Kafiristan had been explored the Geographical Society had better shut up its doors. But I maintain that that is far from being the case. Many countries in all parts of the world are entirely unknown to us. The existence of Kafiristan has been known since it was first mentioned by Major Rennell in his 'Survey of Hindustan,' more than a hundred years ago. It was supposed to be inhabited by people of great interest, more or less descended from some of those Macedonians brought into Central Asia by Alexander and his successors. Mr. Robertson has, in the tea-room, a vase or utensil of some kind which has a Greek inscription on it; and I remember that Mr. Macnair picked up, in a ravine to the south of the Kunar valley, a gem of some kind which Sir Henry Rawlinson pronounced to be Babylonian, and which was almost certainly left there by some soldier in the army of Alexander the Great. These theories and ideas have always given an intense interest to this country of Kafiristan. Therefore, I think you will heartily join with me in a vote—and most cordial vote—of thanks to Mr. Robertson for having opened this country to us, and having given us an exceedingly interesting account of its inhabitants.

